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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CASABLANCA 000189

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STATE FOR NEAR/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2019  
TAGS: [MO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO CRACKS DOWN ON ISLAMIST DISSIDENTS

Classified By: Acting Consul General Ordonez for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the first half of September Moroccan security forces launched a campaign of arrests across the country against the banned Islamist group Al-Adl wal-Ihsan (AWI). The raids forcibly broke up AWI meetings at private residences in three cities and resulted in brief detentions for some members. A spokesman for AWI believes these attacks are little more than the Government of Morocco (GOM) flexing its muscles and denies the renewed repression is linked to recent pro-Palestinian rally organizing efforts with leftist groups or any other AWI activities. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In a rash of recent activity during Ramadan, Moroccan security forces cracked down on meetings of the banned Islamic group Al-Adl wal-Ihsan (AWI - The Justice and Charity Organization) led by the charismatic Sufi Sheikh Abdelsallam Yassine. Hassan Bennajeh, the director of the AWI's Office of Public Relations and a member of the Political Committee, told poloff that throughout the summer there has been a concerted campaign by Morocco's internal intelligence agency, the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DGST), of harassment, threats and intimidation against AWI members. He said the government has arrested or called in scores of AWI members, accused them of involvement in terrorist activities, and even demanded they spy on AWI on behalf of the government.

¶3. (C) According to Bennajeh, on September 3 the police launched simultaneous evening raids on the AWI meetings held bi-monthly in private residences in the cities of Fes and Berkane. These meetings, known as Majlis Nassiha (advice-giving councils), meet to discuss the Quran and morality, he alleged. Shortly after the last evening prayer, the police forcibly entered the house where 37 people were already present though more were en route from the mosque. The police arrested seven people who were taken to the police station, questioned, and released without charge in the early hours of the morning. In the city of Fes it was the same sequence of events. The police arrested 17 of the approximately 70 members at the meeting, questioned and registered their information, and then released them. Notably, among those detained in Fes was Mounir Ragragui, a member of AWI's Political Committee.

¶4. (C) The following week there were two similar incidents in Casablanca. On September 13 in Sbata, a low-income neighborhood, the police arrested 18 people, questioned and detained them at the local police station, and later released them. One the same day, police raided a hotel iftar (Ramadan

breakfast) banquet hosted by the NGO Mubadara (the Initiative) which included prominent members of civil society, journalists, leftist activists and members of AWI. The police shut down the celebration on the basis of presence of AWI though no one was detained, Bennajeh alleged.

15. (C) Bennajeh dismissed the idea that the GOM is trying to send a message or is reacting to specific activities of AWI. This repression, he claimed, is simply part of the same campaign the GOM has actively pursued since May of 2006. He also denied that there is any on-going direct communication between AWI and the government.

16. (C) COMMENT: It is difficult to know with any certainty the reason for the renewed hostilities from the government. Some media sources have speculated that it reflects GOM nervousness regarding AWI's recent partnering with leftist groups to organize pro-Palestinian rallies. On September 9, AWI along with a number of leftist Arab nationalist associations held a sit-in at a public square in Rabat which took place with no GOM interference. The AWI has the ability to mobilize its considerable membership to the streets as it demonstrated during last year's Israeli offensive into Gaza. While plausible that the GOM wants to discourage any other group from cooperating with AWI, it is also just as likely that the GOM is exerting pressure to simply keep AWI in check.

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